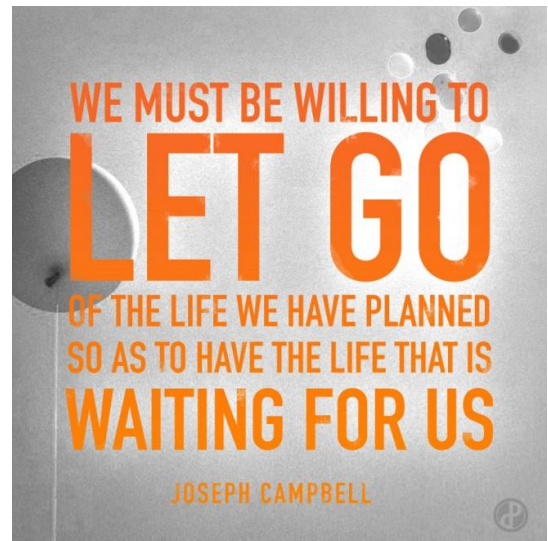




DON'T CLING TO ANYTHING...

An analysis of
Luke 18: 18-24

A. A. MacKenzie
for SGFP Module #1a

Word count = 965 *(not including direct
quotations, sub-headings or footnotes)*

THE INCIDENT -- A Profound Question by a Sincere Inquirer

My essay will examine the discussion between Christ and the rich official as recorded in Luke 18: 18-24 (*The Message*). This brief analysis will examine: (a) key qualities evidenced by Jesus, showing an understanding of the position of the 'directee', and (b) application(s) of this dialogue to overall Spiritual Direction.

THE DIRECTEE – How did he come?

The rich official (heretofore the 'directee') asks Jesus how to 'attain' (acquire) eternal life. In his queries, he seems to be seeking: (a) Christ's approval; (b) his validation and justification [of his own works]; and (c) in the end, an honest answer (the Truth). The directee's initial positioning was that he was steeped in 'legalism' (Judaism); a deeply held core belief that one can simply do what's 'right' (morally, ethically) like keep all Moses' Commandments, and by doing so 'obtain' (deserve, earn) eternal life. The directee also seems to have lost sight of the real truth of God's grace... that earning or 'obtaining' is indeed the *antithesis* of grace – *unmerited* favour.

JESUS ADDRESSES the directee's spiritual needs

Jesus endeavours to grant this person the freedom to see more clearly *radical* Grace. He attempts to help the directee sojourn to a new place of understanding — that you cannot earn, obtain, or inherit eternal life. It is not a commodity to be purchased with good works. To begin with, I believe Christ already knowing this person's heart, decided to suss out his motives for asking, as they may well have been genuine.¹ To do this, Christ asks him about his beliefs and the directee tells responds by telling opening up to Christ "He said, "I've kept them all for as long as I can remember"; and in doing so, sharing his personal story.

Then Jesus decides to issue a two-part command: sell all that he has and give it to the poor; and secondly, become *surrendered* to God:²

"When Jesus heard that, he said, "Then there's **only one thing left to do**: Sell everything you own and give it away to the poor. You will have riches in heaven. Then **come, follow me**." (18:22)

Christ never "lets us off the hook for good behaviour", so-to-speak. Jesus looked at this man and loved him (Mark 10:21). Obviously, his intention was to invite the directee to join him on his journeys, to become one of the disciples, who enjoy the immense and unspeakable privilege of spending time with Jesus and learning from him day-by-day.

Jesus' asks us all exactly the same thing -- to *surrender*; to be obedient by "denying our distractions". Saying 'yes' to Christ means following Jesus' example

¹ If this was a rich Sadducee, as some scholars have suspected, Jesus may have had reason to doubt his true intentions. Intentions aside, Christ still loved him, regardless.

² "Come" is Greek *deuro*, an adverb functioning as an interjection, "here, (come) here, come!" The word "follow" is the characteristic word of discipleship, Greek *akoloutheo*, 'follow,' figuratively, to follow someone as a disciple, 'be a disciple, to follow.'

of self-emptying³. “Nothing short of total devotion will suffice.”⁴ It is not necessarily a call to seek out suffering, but rather, to quote Dr. Charles Ringma, to “*look for the ones who are in pain. The suffering will be provided.*”⁵ “Taking up one’s cross” is not a project or something we do, but something that defines us as ‘Christ followers’.

*“This was the last thing the official expected to hear. He was very rich and became terribly sad. He was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let them go.”*⁶ (Luke 18:23). In this immediate situation, the rich official made his choice; out of his own volition. He loved his possessions more than not only God, but more than this ‘eternal life’ he supposedly wanted. In the end, this directee acknowledges his guilt; yet chooses to cling to his security blanket, for he did not possess them, *they* possessed *him*.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNT about Spiritual Direction from all this?

What does this parable speak to me about direction? The first thing it shows me is a hurdle we must strive to overcome. If we wish to “follow” Jesus, who is “the Way”, we must ‘let go’ of own **distractions** — that which distracts us from self-awareness, and above all, distracts us from God. Jesus himself, in his ministry, was very busy — yet he made it his practice to withdraw regularly to the ‘desert’, his quiet place. Directors/directees need to discover our own equivalent of the desert for the very same reason.

Secondly as directors if we are to become “Christ to others” or to **love our neighbours as ourselves**, then we must first love ourselves. Selfish individualism is a distorted way of understanding our uniqueness. It sees itself as separate, independent, and with a uniqueness that puts itself at the centre of the Cosmos (just another form of vainglory)! Self-love is not the same as individualism as genuine love is one and undivided: we love everyone, including ourselves. The truth is many directees, like the rich official, cannot live with their past and whilst feeling guilty and ashamed, they struggle to forgive themselves.

In this parable, Jesus shows directors/directees that people find what they’re really looking for *in God*. God is love (1 John 4:8) and we’re commanded to love God with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). However, this solution is usually overlooked because of our external attachments. A major theme in spirituality is **detachment**, because “*Love comes, through non-clinging, as the door Unconditioned opens, our hearts and our will purified and prepared to receive the Will of God*”.⁷ As directors, we must strive to become detached to any agendas, planned approaches,

³ Phillipians 2:8-11.

⁴ Juel, Donald. (1990). *Luke: Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament*, Augsburg Fortress Press, p. 123.

⁵ Ringma, Charles. Class lecture, CHC, 3/31/08.

⁶ The word translated "sad" is Greek *perilupos*, "very sad, deeply grieved." Matthew and Mark note that the man went away sorrowful. His face stricken with grief ("the man's face fell," it says in Mark 10:22). He cannot go with Jesus, as much as he would love to. Because he loves something else more...

⁷ Excerpt taken from <http://www.innerfrontier.org/Practices/NonClinging.htm>

compulsions, etc. When allowed, Christ answers prayer from the stance of true love, true compassion and true righteousness, operating from a Divine point of reference.

Like all “good directors” (Luke 18: 18) Jesus helps to ‘direct our gaze’ toward the inner self, to the inner journey and to ultimate surrender. His ‘Way’ is the way toward the true self -- found in abandonment to God. In that moment of abandon, we are most in touch with the Spirit of God within us. As Richard Rohr (1999) says, this knowing offers total freedom⁸:

“The Spirit will always be totally unmerited grace. She always takes the initiative. The Holy Spirit is experienced as intimacy and warmth and fire, as the power to love beyond boundaries and ethnicities. She is presented as surprising, elusive and free, and yet totally given. The Spirit comes from no place we can control, least of all by our good behavior or even our bad behavior. All we can do is surrender... and let go.” (p. 192).

Abandon can sometimes be aided by directors who, not by commanding others to do things like Christ did, but to simply help the directee remember an experience or a revelation of God’s utter acceptance – a time when s/he knew as deeply as they have known anything that we are loved – there is nothing we can do – it is, after all, all grace.

"Come, follow me," is the invitation extended to all — “let go” of our past, our future, and just be in the now with Christ and His spirit. A.W. Tozer, in *Keys to the Deeper Life*, explains “It’s not that people don’t want God – it’s that people “found something they wanted more than God... The rich official made his choice...”⁹ The Trinity is all about freedom of choice...and the outpouring of abundant Grace!

As directees and Spiritual directors, none should ever lose sight of this grace...true?

⁸ Rohr, R. (1995). *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations* (day 206), St. Anthony Messenger Press, p. 192.

⁹ Tozer, A.W. (1984). *Keys to the Deeper Life*, Creation House, p. .